

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic nameRecoleta

other names/site numberVDHR file no. 104-5086

2. Location

street & number120 Rothery RoadN/A not for publication

city or townCharlottesvilleN/A vicinity

stateVirginiacode VAcounty Charlottesville (city)code 540zip code22903

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register.

___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined eligible for the National Register.

___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined not eligible for the National Register.

___ removed from the National Register.

___ other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Recoleta

Name of Property

Charlottesville, Va

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property Number of Resources within Property

(Check only one box)

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

1 sites

0 structures

0 objects

2 Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category

Subcategory

DOMESTIC
LANDSCAPE

multiple dwelling
garden

LANDSCAPE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category

Subcategory

DOMESTIC
garden
DOMESTIC
GARDEN

multiple dwelling
secondary structure
pergola gate

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation
walls

Concrete
Concrete

roof
other

Terra Cotta
Wood
Metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Recoleta
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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and the past fifty years.
distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1940-46

Significant Dates

1940

1946

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Rothery, Agnes Edwards (architect)

Baker, Benjamin Charles (architect)

Lee, R. E. (contractor)

Suydam, Edward Howard (light fixtures)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Recoleta
Name of Property

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10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property approximately 1 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	718540	4212960	3	17
2	17			4	17

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>J. Daniel Pezzoni</u>		
organization	<u>Landmark Preservation Associates</u>	date	<u>June 6, 2003</u>
street & number	<u>6 Houston St.</u>	telephone	<u>(540) 464-5315</u>
city or town	<u>Lexington</u>	state	<u>VA</u>
		zip code	<u>24450</u>

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	<u>Mrs. Virginia O. Stokes</u>		
street & number	<u>PO Box 3262 (120 Rothery Rd.)</u>	telephone	<u>(434) 295-2047</u>
city or town	<u>Charlottesville</u>	state	<u>VA</u>
		zip code	<u>22903</u>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

Recoleta is located at 120 Rothery Road in the Lewis Mountain neighborhood of Charlottesville, Virginia. The two-story Spanish Colonial Revival house, built in 1940, has a south garden front, a north entry elevation, and a three-story (with basement) west elevation that overlooks a driveway and wooded slope that descend to Rothery Road. The house is constructed of reinforced cinder block and has a red tile gable roof, arched openings, an exterior stair, a balcony, and steel-framed casement windows. The basically U-shaped plan embraces on the garden front a patio flanked by one-story loggias. The interior has painted block and stucco walls, wood and stone floors, and wood beam, board, and stucco ceilings. The living room and a study above have rounded corner fireplaces, and there is decorative ironwork and woodwork, much of it imported, throughout. On the south side of the house is a yard and garden area enclosed by a cinder block wall built in 1946 that incorporates a fountain wall with a tile roof, circular lantern niches, and a patio.

Inventory

1. Recoleta. 1940. Contributing building.
2. Garden. 1946; 1960s. Contributing site.
3. Shed. 1960s. Noncontributing building.
4. Pergola gate. 1980s. Noncontributing structure.

Exterior

Recoleta's cinder block exterior was originally painted terra cotta with a pale yellow wash for a stucco effect (the present color is similar). Decorative rafter ends project under the eaves of the red Spanish tile gable roofs and plain masonry chimneys--one for the boiler, another for fireplaces--rise above. There are diamond-shaped perforated blue glazed tiles used as vents in the one west and two south gables and a green tile vent in the east gable. The recessed patio on the south elevation is flanked by one-story porches or portales (the Southwest Hispanic term) which were referred to by the Pratts and their architect as loggias. The shed roofed loggias have parapet ends (extensions of the house walls) with decorative concave curved tops and round archways. The east archway is open and is surmounted by a concrete gargoyle; the west one is filled and has honeycomb vents and a carved and pierced arched stone grille. The loggias are supported by rustic timber posts with curved brackets and they have ceilings with exposed viga-like log rafters (replacements of the originals)

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Description (continued)

from which hang original or early pierced metal globe light fixtures. The east loggia shelters a square niche in the house wall with carved, painted, and grated Norwegian wood doors. The niche contains an Egyptian-style cat sculpture which has been there since the 1940s. The centered French door opening onto the patio has a cast-iron trellis border with a pattern of latticework and flowers.

The north elevation has a roughly symmetrical three-part form with a slightly taller and projecting middle section. The first story of this section has a band of high living room windows; the second story has a band of taller studio windows with a window box. To the right of the living room windows is a round archway with a recessed entry. This entry, the principal one of the house, has a beaded batten door with an original cat door opening. On the wall beside the entry archway is a decorative iron bell and pull. Above the entry archway exterior steps rise to a second-story studio entry behind a stepped parapet. To the left of the living room windows is a shed-roofed vestibule with a round archway that opens into a small entry porch. The porch is lit by a rectangular opening with a grate formed by square-section balusters with turned rings. The entry sheltered by the porch provides access to apartments in the house's east wing. Extending from the east wing entry west and wrapping around the west elevation is a terrace with a soapstone flagstone pavement and bordered by a low wall with a round-arched niche at the west end.

The irregular west elevation has a full basement story with a recessed entry in a wide round archway. A driveway leads up to the elevation and serves a basement-level two-vehicle garage wing. The beam over the garage entry is supported by a round log post. Exterior steps rise from the driveway behind a stepped parapet to the north terrace. The west elevation also has a second-story balcony and a walled terrace extension on the south end. The east elevation has a small shed-roofed garden shed extension.

Interior

The principal interior space is the living room, which occupies the house's midsection. The room has a soapstone flagstone floor, walls with a rustic stucco finish and bevelled baseboards, and dark-stained circular-sawn ceiling beams with "Bildrite" plasterboard panels between (the dining room has the same ceiling). In the northeast corner of the room is a chimney breast of quarter-circular plan with a fireplace below a curved lintel. The lintel has an inscription in the form of a painted gray band with gilded Runic-style letters that read: "Harry Rogers Pratt & Agnes Rothery Pratt Built This Home Anno Domini [date]" (the date is unclear). Above the lintel the chimney has a conical form. Flanking the chimney are tin and glass electric candle wall sconces with swan and lion-like creatures in the surrounds. In the northwest corner are dark-stained book shelves with, at the end of the base

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cabinet, a safe with a wood door with elaborate wrought iron strap hinges and latch.

In the southwest corner of the dining room is a doorway that leads to a hallway that connects to the entrance foyer, dining room, and kitchen. Originally this doorway was fitted with double-leaf wood doors, but after construction Agnes Rothery had them replaced with wrought iron grillework doors to keep her Siamese cats out of the living room (there are cat doors throughout the house). The doors have a gridded pattern overlaid with flat and twisted ornament. The double-leaf wood door between the hallway and foyer has handles fashioned from pieces of a South American cart; one of them is inscribed "Ao 1774" with petaled star-like designs. A two-run stair rises in the foyer accompanied by a stepped wall with wood copings.

The dining room has a beam ceiling and a ceiling light with a large tin shade of square fan-fold design. To the left of the window in this room is a blocked opening that plans indicate was for an air conditioner (that may never have been installed). The dining room connects to a pantry with original shelving, base cabinets with a tray rack with decorative dividers and doors under the sink with perforated tin panels, and a Spanish tile counter top (put in after 1954). The kitchen has a dumb waiter to the basement, an original hutch with an arched top, base cabinets like those in the pantry, and a 1960s tile counter top. The east first-floor section of the house has an apartment with a bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom, and a second entry foyer with a simple dark-stained railing with a diagonal intermediate rail below the handrail.

The principal second-floor room is the study, located above the living room. Like the living room the study has a conical corner chimney with a crude round-arched fireplace and a semicircular soapstone hearth. The chimney is flanked by sconces similar to those in the living room but with mirrored backs rather than glass cases. The east and west ends of the study are occupied by book shelves; the west shelves are original. The second floor rooms typically have coved ceilings sheathed with knotty pine boards. The basement contains a maid's suite and a room used as a darkroom by Harry Pratt. Basement finishes include concrete floors and poured concrete and cinder block walls.

Grounds

The garden on the south side of the house is largely comprised of a rectangular lawn that parallels the house. It is enclosed on the south property line by a 1946 cinder block wall with a taller section on axis with the patio entry. This taller wall is topped by a Spanish tile pent roof and has a round-arched niche with a concrete statue that empties water into a raised rectangular basin. Flanking the

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Description (continued)

niche are two round lantern niches with ornamental pierced metal covers. A small flagstone patio extends in front and raised flower beds, added in the 1960s, extend east and west along the wall. At the west end of the garden is a slightly sunken rose garden created in the 1960s by Virginia Stokes. At the east end of the garden is a slightly raised flagstone patio enclosed by a cinder block wall. This patio was built in the 1960s by an English student who rented an apartment in the house. The patio wall has a higher, arched section (on axis with the long axis of the garden) with a round-arched niche containing a fish fountain and flanked by electric lanterns. The fountain empties into a gold fish pool with a cinder block and decorative tile raised border. At the south end of the patio is the small tomb of a pet dog.

The north yard has a triangular form that tapers at the north end. At the tip, obscured by trees and undergrowth, is a plain 1960s cinder block wood shed with a shed roof and open side. On the east side of the yard is a pergola gate that connects to a driveway that connects to Cresap Road. The gate was built by an architecture student in the 1980s.

Integrity Statement

Recoleta possesses very good architectural integrity from the period of significance. No substantive changes have been made to the exterior since construction in 1940, and interior alterations are minor. The property retains the principal landscape features put in place in the 1940s, plus extensions of the south garden made in the same vein in the 1960s. Recoleta's setting is also little changed from its original character, with mid-twentieth century suburban homes on wooded lots.

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Charlottesville, Va.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Recoleta, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, is a Spanish Colonial Revival house built in 1940 for University of Virginia music professor Harry Rogers Pratt and his wife, Agnes Edwards Rothery Pratt. Agnes Rothery was a prolific writer of travel books who also authored three books on her adopted home of Virginia: *Houses Virginians Have Loved*, *New Roads in Old Virginia*, and *A Fitting Habitation*. The latter book reveals the sophisticated design process behind Recoleta's creation. The house was modeled on South American courtyard houses the Pratts had admired on their travels, but it also incorporated concepts from California Mission-style design and Scandinavian folk architecture, among other influences. To help realize their plans the Pratts retained Charlottesville architect Charles Benjamin Baker, who designed a two-story house of cinder block construction painted to simulate aged stucco. A red tile roof, a garden front with patio and loggias, rounded corner fireplaces, and wood, stone, and wrought iron architectural ornaments collected abroad add to the house's charm. Artist Edward Howard Suydam, a friend of the Pratts', designed the Mexican tin light fixtures that grace the interior. In their later years the Pratts befriended William Ewart Stokes Jr. and Virginia Harmon, who were married in Recoleta's living room in 1947 and who acquired the property in 1954. Virginia Stokes has preserved Recoleta in detail to the present.

Applicable Criteria

Recoleta meets Criterion C and is eligible in the architecture area of significance as one of Charlottesville's preeminent examples of the Spanish Classical Revival Style (Lay, *Architecture of Jefferson Country*, 265) and for its architectural refinement, novelty, sophistication, and imagination. Recoleta's architectural significance is enhanced by the existence of a detailed published account of the design process that led to the construction of the house, and by the survival of well-preserved landscaped grounds. The period of significance extends from the date of construction of the house in 1940 until the date of construction of the garden wall in 1946. Recoleta is eligible at the local level of significance. Information in support of eligibility appears throughout the historic context.

Acknowledgments

A number of individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Foremost among these were the owner of the property and the nomination's sponsor, Virginia O. Stokes, and

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Lloyd Thomas Smith Jr. Others who provided assistance included James R. Boyd, AIA, of Heyward, Boyd & Anderson, PC; Margaret O'Brien, Albemarle County Historical Society; and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Historic Context

Recoleta is the fruition of years of architectural planning and experimentation by its original owners Agnes Edwards Rothery Pratt (1887-1954) and her husband Harry Rogers Pratt (1886-1956). Agnes Rothery--she kept her maiden name as her professional name--was a native of Brookline, Massachusetts. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1909 and joined the staff of *Ladies Home Journal* as an assistant editor. Later she served as Literary Editor of the Boston *Herald*, and she was a contributor to *Reader's Digest*, *House Beautiful* (for which she once served as travel editor), and the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Pratt, who was also from Massachusetts, began a career in music as a "boy soprano soloist" in 1891 and went on to study music and philosophy at Harvard. His subsequent career involved Shakespearean acting and positions as organist and choirmaster in Hartford, Connecticut, and musical director of the Lake Placid Foundation. Pratt and Rothery wed in 1917 and moved to Charlottesville in 1923 when Pratt was made a professor of music at the University of Virginia. From 1923 to 1940 the Pratts lived in and substantially remodeled a house on the UVA grounds known as The Mews.¹

Beginning in the late 1920s Rothery specialized in travel writing, and she and her husband travelled abroad during summer vacations for most of the remaining years of their lives. Pratt took the photographs for a number of his wife's books. (The Pratts' travels had a strong influence on the design of Recoleta, as discussed below.) Locales featured in Rothery's books included South America, Central America, Scandinavia (including Iceland), Italy, and British Columbia. Rothery's book *Denmark, Kingdom of Reason* was awarded King Christian X's Medal of Liberation. Over the course of her career she published over thirty works including children books and a play *Miss Coolidge*.²

¹ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 12, 1954; *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, February 3, 1938 and May 9, 1953. "Recoleta" probably derives from a Spanish word meaning quite, peaceful, isolated, perhaps with a play on the English word recollect.

² *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 12, 1954; Costen, "Agnes Rothery."

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Rothery wrote three books on Virginia topics: *Houses Virginians Have Loved*, *New Roads in Old Virginia*, and her autobiography, *A Fitting Habitation*. *Houses Virginians Have Loved*, published in 1954 and one of Rothery's last works, featured several well-known Virginia landmarks but its main focus was "uncelebrated dwellings." Rothery gave the book a more comprehensive geographical coverage than earlier treatments of the Commonwealth's domestic architecture, including houses from the still relatively unstudied Southwest Virginia region, for example. The houses selected, however, were almost exclusively antebellum, reflecting the historical preoccupations of Rothery's mid-twentieth century readership. *Houses Virginians Have Loved*, Rothery explained in her foreword, "is chiefly concerned with stories, authenticated as accurately as possible, of less familiar places which have been lived in and loved and are thus infused with personal intimacy." Sense of place was also a main ingredient in *A Fitting Habitation*, essentially an autobiography told as the story of the Pratts' experiences living in and remodeling houses from their newlywed starter house through the construction of Recoleta in 1940. *A Fitting Habitation* went through five printings from 1944 to 1946, when it gained four chapters detailing later events in the evolution of Recoleta and its grounds.³

While Rothery cultivated a career as a writer, Harry Pratt concentrated on developing UVA's music and dramatics programs. In 1926 Pratt was chosen for the director of the Virginia Players, a pick that one historian has termed "a milestone in establishing permanent amateur dramatics at the University." In the 1930s Pratt led a campaign to create a "little theater" performance hall on campus that resulted in the construction of the theater in Minor Hall. Pratt developed the Virginia Glee Club into a nationally recognized performing group. In relation to his work with the Club, it has been said that Pratt "wasn't as musically sophisticated as later directors," but one of his students recalled him as "a marvelous old fellow [who] made certain we had a lot of fun." Pratt was often called upon to organize musical events for the university, as when Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau visited UVA in 1943, and he played organ at the university's official exercises for many years. Pratt also composed choral and instrumental works including a piece entitled *The Miracle of Chartres*.⁴

As discussed in greater detail below, the Pratts built Recoleta in 1940 to serve as their residence and

³ Rothery, *Houses Virginians Have Loved*, vii; Costen, "Agnes Rothery."

⁴ Sydenham, "Reflections of national dramatic trends in Charlottesville," 51; Gilbert, "When life was a song," 63; Parlier, *Pursuits of War*, 29, 31; and *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, February 3, 1938 and May 9, 1953.

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as rental units for students and unmarried professors. During World War II military officers billeted in the house and Harry Pratt taught a course in aerial navigation. In their later years the Pratts formed a friendship with student William Ewart Stokes Jr. and his fiancée Virginia Harmon. Stokes and Harmon were married in Recoleta's living room in 1947, and in 1954 Rothery dedicated *Houses Virginians Have Loved* to the couple. Harry Pratt retired in 1953 and both he and Agnes Rothery died the following year. Recoleta was acquired by the Stokeses, and Virginia Stokes has faithfully preserved Recoleta, its grounds, and many of its original furnishings and works of art.⁵

Architectural Analysis

Agnes Rothery's *A Fitting Habitation* provides a wealth of information on the planning and realization of Recoleta. Rothery first indulged her "lifelong passion of playing with a house" at The Mews, which underwent numerous remodelings during her tenure there. She has written that she would have been content to live out her days at The Mews, but her husband wanted to build a country house, and he pointed out that they could not remain on campus after his retirement. Rothery did not want to live too far distant from campus. Consequently, in May 1938 the Pratts purchased a lot in the subdivided Morea plantation across Emmet Road from the university.⁶

The basic design concept for Recoleta emerged soon after the Pratts purchased the house site. As Rothery recalled: "We discussed and agreed and disagreed and compromised. We drew floor plans by the score." Despite "a hundred minor changes," the Pratts stuck to a core idea: "A long narrow house . . . with two wings built at right angles to it. The entire central portion would be the living room opening into the patio, with a studio of similar proportions above it." A red tile roof, an outside stair, a balcony, and a double garage were other early features. The Pratts' plans drew upon their experiences at home--years of architectural tinkering at The Mews--and afar. Rothery was impressed by houses she had seen in California "where indoors and outdoors are part of the same living plan." This comment and Rothery's admiration for the use of ornamental wrought iron in Santa Barbara suggests California's Spanish-influenced domestic architecture of the early twentieth century contributed to Recoleta's design. A loggia the couple had enjoyed in Lima inspired them to add not one but two loggias flanking the patio "to catch the breeze from the west as well as the east, and to

⁵ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 209, 215; *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, May 9, 1953; Virginia Stokes personal communication.

⁶ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 127-131, 165-166; Albemarle County Deed Book 239, p. 534.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

provide shade at any hour." Their travels in the late 1930s provided additional inspiration and purchases for the home to be. In Norway they acquired architect's blue prints for a corner fireplace. "We had admired these handsome and massive fireplaces in all the Scandinavian countries," Rothery recalled. Also from Norway came the painted doors that were eventually installed in the east loggia.⁷

In 1939 Rothery and Pratt retained Charlottesville architect Benjamin Charles Baker (1884-1955) to help them with Recoleta. Baker, a native of Rhode Island, studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole des Beaux Arts and practiced with McKim, Mead & White before moving to Charlottesville and forming a partnership with Ben Henderson Heyward in 1938. "When the architect brought us his first tentative drawings and large, beautifully finished water color sketch of the completed house," Rothery wrote, "there was no doubt that this was precisely what we had in mind." "There it was," Rothery continues:

The long two-story central portion one room thick, facing the south. Its two wings, each with a loggia, surrounded a patio which faced our neighbors' gardens . . . The west side, facing the wooded road, was on the hillside, and was, therefore, three stories in height. One ascended this by a flight of outdoor steps, on whose balustrade already stood, in charming water colors, red pots filled with greenery and flowers. The north side--always the least desirable exposure in this part of Virginia--would accommodate the entrances to the east and west wings and another outside stair leading to the studio . . . The water color sketch suggested a construction of stone or brick or stucco, with an overhanging roof of red tiles. The whole effect was simple, masculine and substantial, and we accepted the plans immediately."

Baker's interior plan incorporated a key programmatic requirement of the Pratts. The east wing and second-floor studio were designed with separate entrances and bathrooms so that they could be closed off from the Pratt residence and let to tenants.⁸

Durability and low maintenance were also important considerations for the Pratts, whose upkeep of The Mews was a running battle with decay. Baker's design met these criteria. As Rothery wrote:

⁷ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 87, 132-133, 137, 138.

⁸ Ibid., 166-168; Heyward, Boyd & Anderson, PC, website; Wells and Dalton, *The Virginia Architects*, 15; and James R. Boyd personal communication.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

So the floors downstairs were of native soapstone which would never have to be polished: the ceilings were of wood--beamed downstairs, solid upstairs--which would not have to be plastered. The thick walls did not need to be plastered or papered or panelled inside, but their surface would be frankly revealed through a light-colored wash. It was fire-proof, termite-proof, age and weather and tenant-proof.

Another apparent factor in the design was the requirement, contained in the 1938 deed of sale to the Pratts, that the house have a sixty-foot-wide elevation fronting on the street.⁹

Rothery mentions the cinder block construction of the house in passing but does not elaborate on its choice. Presumably it was suggested by the architect as a way to achieve the appearance and durability of masonry at an affordable cost. As the house walls went up the Pratts' friends "thought the bleak gray mass horrible to look at," and the insertion of the steel casement windows prompted one acquaintance to compare the house to a prison. ("A debtor's prison," quipped Harry Pratt.) When the painters applied the red base coat, the neighbors "avoided meeting us on the street:"

But when the terra cotta had been washed over with yellow, they drew a breath of relief. [When] the yellow was lightly brushed over the rough surface, the red merely showed through in rosy flecks. The newly painted walls, with their variation of tone and tint and texture, appeared already as if mellowed by age, and time and weather would only better the effect.

The house, completed by the summer of 1940, at first struck Rothery as "a little too grand." "We had intended a sort of simple South American farm house," she wrote, "not a Spanish castle."¹⁰

The original plans and water color rendering of Recoleta are apparently lost, although some detail studies have been preserved at the offices of Heyward, Boyd & Anderson, PC, in Charlottesville, and these provide insights into the evolution of the house at the detail level. The earliest surviving studies date to June 1939; most were rendered in December 1939; and a few date as late as February 1940. For the most part the studies show aspects of the house as they were actually constructed. The kitchen, for example, faithfully follows a January 1940 plan study which portrays some of the

⁹ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 168; Albemarle County Deed Book 239, p. 534.

¹⁰ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 168-171.

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house's (few) missing original features: linoleum counter tops with white metal edgings and a swinging door between the kitchen and pantry. Some features that are present are not portrayed--for example, the carved handles on the foyer/hallway door--and other treatments depicted in the drawings were not carried out. In the latter category are built in cabinets and shelving on the south wall of the dining room. The cabinet doors were hung on decorative strap hinges, and the cabinets and shelves were organized by a row of posts with bracketed tops like those of the loggias just outside. The left-hand cabinet was to conceal an air conditioning unit that was apparently never installed, although an intake opening for it was made in the wall during construction. The Pratts decided not to put in the cabinets, perhaps because the room would have been made too cramped.¹¹

The Pratts moved in in July 1940 accompanied by their maid Marie, for whom quarters had been created in the basement although she apparently rarely or never used them overnight. The first tenants were a professor of orthopedic surgery, who took the first-floor suite in the east wing; two students, Bus and Merrill, who roomed above the surgeon; and a Greek professor nicknamed Tino was given the second-floor space that Rothery would eventually use as a studio. With the owners and tenants moved in, Recoleta's main shortcoming became apparent. The Pratts and their architect had succeeded in devising a plan that maximized privacy, with separate entries, a cloistered patio, and a high living room window on the relatively public north side, but despite his client's insistence the architect had not made adequate provision for soundproofing. The Greek professor's love of listening to and playing music--he was a church organist--"battered down, drenched, submerged and drowned" the Pratts with music when they used the living room. Rothery remarked that although she and her husband were hoping for the peace and privacy of a South American courtyard house, they found that life at Recoleta was more like living in a South American caravansary.¹²

Artist Edward Howard Suydam (1885-1940) was a guest of the Pratts at The Mews in the late 1930s and he joined them again for their first Christmas at Recoleta. A native of New Jersey, Suydam was a celebrated book illustrator who specialized in painting American cityscapes. When Recoleta was being planned and built, Suydam traveled to Mexico to design and supervise the fabrication of the house's handmade tin light fixtures. Tragically, Suydam died of heart failure while at Recoleta, and

¹¹ Heyward, Boyd & Anderson, PC, collection; Virginia Stokes and James Boyd personal communication.

¹² Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 173, 183-187; Costen, "Agnes Rothery," and Virginia Stokes personal communication.

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in the following months the Pratts sensed that Suydam's spirit visited them. Rothery wrote: "He had taken great pleasure in designing the lamps and lanterns, sconces and mirrors of pierced and polished tin, and that their beauty still gave him joy was evident when we realized that he was regarding them with approval."¹³

The Pratts completed and furnished their house but before they could give due consideration to the grounds the nation entered World War II. During the war Harry Pratt had a henhouse built on the property (now gone) and the couple planted a Victory garden on the north side of the house. A rail fence bounded the south property line until 1946 when the Pratts replaced it with the present cinder block wall. They ornamented the fountain section of the wall with circular carved stone grilles that they scavenged from a demolished Washington embassy. In the 1960s the garden wall was extended by Virginia Stokes on the west end and a second fountain added in keeping with the design of the original improvements. Stokes has carefully maintained the historic character of Recoleta's grounds and house to the present.¹⁴

¹³ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 193; Museum of the City of New York website; and Virginia Stokes personal communication.

¹⁴ Rothery, *A Fitting Habitation*, 209, 236; Virginia Stokes personal communication.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated area corresponds to City of Charlottesville tax parcel 080-030-000 and is portrayed on the 1:200-scale map that accompanies the nomination.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated area correspond to the present boundaries of the tax parcel on which Recoleta and its grounds are situated.

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. 1. Subject: Recoleta (same for all photos)
 2. Location: Charlottesville, Virginia (same for all photos)
 3. Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni (same for all photos)
 4. Photo date: November 2002 (same for all photos)
 5. Original negative (VDHR # 20264) archived at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond (same for all photos)
 6. Description of view: South elevation. View looking northwest.
 7. Photograph number appears at beginning of entry (same for all photos)
2. 6. East and north elevations. View looking southwest.
3. 6. West elevation with garage wing. View looking east.
4. 6. Living room.
5. 6. Study.
6. 6. South garden. View looking west.

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Exhibit A: Recoleta nominated parcel. Scale: 1 inch equals 200 feet. Number and direction of view of exterior photographs indicated by triangular markers.